

RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

FRANCE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Robbin F. Laird

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1. Enclosure (1) is forwarded as a matter of possible interest.
2. This Research Memorandum, part of a CNA project on issues and developments in the Western Alliance, examines changes in the assumptions undergirding French security policy since the classic Gaullist formulations of the 1960s and 1970s--particularly in relationship to European security. While the French will not abandon the primacy of national independence in their security doctrine, their desire for a strong European pillar in the NATO Alliance remains. Measures that would normally be identified with NATO reintegration--and, therefore, anathema within French society--could find acceptability under the rubric of European defense cooperation. A striking departure in this vein centers on the French tactical nuclear weapons doctrine. The increased range of the coming generation of forces will enable targeting beyond West Germany from French territory, thereby freeing French forces for an early entry into the conventional battle.

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FRANCE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

In the 1960s, French defense policy emphasized the protection of French territory rather than the collective security of France and her European allies. This began to change in the late 1970s. The French contribution to European security is now a matter of considerable debate within France. This memorandum examines the issues and the options that are involved.

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INTRODUCTION

Classic Gaullist French defense policy, established during the 1960s, emphasized the protection of French territory rather than the collective security of France and her European allies. Since the mid-1970s but especially in the 1980s, a debate has emerged concerning France's contribution to European security. The discussion has focused both on measures within the parameters of current defense policy and on relatively significant modifications of that policy.

THE CLASSIC GAULLIST SYNTHESIS

President DeGaulle built his security synthesis on the historical aspiration of the French to play a critical role in world affairs. DeGaulle linked French aspiration for international status and prestige with the key concept of national independence. He interpreted independence in a specific manner. Although France would maintain ties and commitments to its allies, the French government must always be able to place national interests above allied commitments. Put another way, alliances are always subordinate to national interests.

DeGaulle emphasized two components of "independence" in the mid-1970s to restore (as he saw it) French national sovereignty, namely the independent nuclear force and the withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command. The possession of an independent nuclear force and the withdrawal from the integrated military command fulfilled several objectives which still shape French policy.

Three of the objectives are purely political. The French believe that a nuclear arsenal brings prestige to France and is the *sine qua non* of an independent foreign policy. Also, it is widely believed in France that membership in the integrated NATO command placed France in a subordinate position vis-a-vis the United States. The subservience of French forces to American command appeared to work at cross purposes with the French desire to have to an independent foreign policy.

In addition, doubts were expressed about the credibility of the American nuclear guarantee. The French saw their own deterrent force as the best means of ultimately safeguarding their territory and national sovereignty. DeGaulle reacted particularly strongly to the formulation of the flexible response strategy, believing that the real meaning of the strategy was to make Europe a potential nuclear battlefield between the superpowers.

Finally, an independent foreign policy meant that France would be able to avoid becoming engaged in armed conflict without taking a deliberate national decision to do so. Such a "no automaticity" requirement required the removal of French forces from front-line positions in Germany. This action was designed to provide the French government with the option of evaluating the origins, nature, and stakes

of any future European conflict prior to committing French military forces.

CHANGING ASSUMPTIONS

A broad degree of consensus among the non-communist French political parties that old assumptions about the European security environment are no longer valid has spurred defense policy innovations. Two assumptions, critical to the formulation of Gaullist defense policy, have been especially subjected to change.

The first assumption was that the Soviet Union no longer posed a serious military threat to Western Europe. For Gaullists, the belief in the tradition of nations over regimes led to emphasizing the "eternal Russia," with whom France had a long history of relations, as opposed to the more recent "Soviet" enemy. Gaullists also remained attached to the idea of using good relations with Moscow to enhance France's diplomatic position. Similarly, President Giscard d'Estaing firmly believed that detente and trade could lead to a democratization of the Soviet regime. Harmonious relations with the Soviet Union also attenuated French communist opposition to conservative governments, thus helping to keep the Left from assuming power in France.

The second assumption behind Gaullist defense policy was that West Germany would continue to provide a stable security shield for France. This had two corollaries: the United States would maintain a strong commitment to West German security and the West Germans would remain relatively content with their security situation.

These are no longer accepted as valid within the French debate on security. Above all, the Soviet Union is perceived as a significant politico-military threat by all three non-communist political formations. The breakdown of the Union of the Left in 1977 started a Socialist Party anti-Soviet evolution that was spurred on by the human rights issue. The growth of Soviet military power and the series of military interventions by the Soviet Union and its proxies had a considerable impact on the views of French political leaders. During the 1981 Presidential campaign, Mitterrand was extremely critical of Giscard d'Estaing's "Ostpolitik." After becoming president, Mitterrand defined a firm policy towards the Soviet Union in part to demonstrate to the NATO allies that Communist participation in the government would not affect French foreign policy.

French concern over American policy also intensified during the 1980s. The French have been generally suspicious of American-sponsored efforts to raise NATO's nuclear threshold, and fear that American policy is evolving towards the elimination of the last vestiges of a credible extended nuclear deterrent. The marked tendency in France is to equate

the "no first use" option with the proposals put forward by General Rogers. The formulation may be different but the practical outcome is seen to be identical from the French point of view.

Finally, the French have become preoccupied with the three West German "isms": nationalism, neutralism, and pacifism. The perception of an increasingly uncertain American guarantee and of political unrest in West Germany has greatly fueled French fears over the future solidity of their West German security shield.

THE MITTERRAND PRESIDENCY

The Mitterrand government consequently elaborated its Five-Year Defense Program amidst considerable domestic political backing for the idea that France should take steps to manifest greater military solidarity with its allies. The response of Mitterrand's government centered around a restructuring of French conventional forces and a modernization of France's tactical nuclear weapons.

France is creating a conventionally armed rapid action force (FAR) which will be able to intervene alongside NATO forces prior to or at the outset of a European conflict. Official statements have affirmed that the purpose of the FAR is to eliminate all ambiguity concerning the ability of French conventional forces to contribute to West European defense.

The FAR will be composed of five divisions, of which three already exist: a marine infantry, a parachute, and an Alpine division. A light armored division and an air-mobile division have yet to be formed. The three light infantry divisions will be heavily equipped in anti-tank weapons and surface-to-air missiles. The air-mobile division will consist of 240 combat helicopters, mainly for anti-tank missions, and three infantry regiments, also equipped with anti-tank weapons. The light armored division will be formed around AMX-10RC light armored vehicles, capable of speeds up to 85 kilometers per hour.

Nonetheless, the restructuring of conventional forces includes a reduction in strength of the First Army. While the First Corps of the First Army, composed of the three armored divisions based in West Germany, will receive a reinforcement of 100 main battle tanks, the Second Corps, based in Eastern France, will lose two of its four armored divisions.

The centerpiece of the tactical nuclear weapons modernization is the Hades ground-launched missile. Its significance lies in its range of 350 kilometers, as opposed to 120 kilometers for the Pluton missile. Paradoxically, the Hades will also enhance France's conventional contribution to Allied security. The greater range of the Hades will enable France to decouple its last warning tactical nuclear strike from the operations of the First Army. The Hades will remain in

France, facilitating tight political control and, in the French view, benefiting from the "sanctuarization" of French territory. The First Army will acquire the flexibility to execute its mission as a NATO reserve force.

The Hades missile and the new air-to-surface medium-range missile (ASMP) will result in greatly increased tactical nuclear target coverage and firepower. However, the French Government has greatly stressed that tactical nuclear weapons will not be used to conduct a "nuclear battle."

According to official pronouncements, the tactical nuclear modernization will bring several benefits. It will enable France to execute its tactical warning strike without hitting West German soil. Greatly increased firepower will render the warning strike more devastating and effective. Lastly, Defense Minister Hernu has stated that the decoupling of the tactical nuclear force from the operations of the First Army accentuates the tactical nuclear role of a last warning.

French officials have suggested, however, that a more flexible use of tactical nuclear weapons is possible. Officials have noted that the tactical modernization will increase Soviet uncertainty as to when France might cross the nuclear threshold. The added flexibility concerning the moment of use and the targeting of the Hades-ASMP duo, will, according to the Head of the French Joint Chiefs of Staff, increase Soviet uncertainty as to exactly where French "vital interests" begin.

In addition to these force posture changes, the French have also taken politico-military initiatives to highlight their concern for European security. France and Germany have for the first time activated the provision in the 1963 bilateral friendship treaty that calls for regular defense consultations. Subjects for bilateral talks are reported to include French tactical nuclear weapons deployments, a joint threat analysis, and ways to improve cooperation on weapons development. The two countries have recently agreed to build jointly an anti-tank helicopter. And Mitterrand dramatically intervened in West German domestic politics in January 1983, only some two months before the West German parliamentary elections, he gave a speech to the German Parliament endorsing NATO's Pershing II and cruise missile deployment. Mitterrand's strong public endorsements of the Euromissile deployment contrasts with his predecessor's official silence on the issue.

Mitterrand has drawn France somewhat closer to NATO. For the first time in seventeen years, Paris played host in June 1983 to a meeting of the Atlantic Council. Also in June of 1983, France participated in a large NATO sea-air exercise, and for the first time since 1966, allowed NATO planes to refuel in French airspace. Most significantly, Hernu has openly acknowledged that deployment of the FAR would necessitate Allied air cover and logistical support.

Criticism of the Socialist program by the opposition parties has focused primarily on the fiscal constraints of the defense budget under Mitterrand. Whereas the Government defense program is aiming for 2 percent real growth from 1984-1988 and raising defense spending as a percentage of GNP from 3.91 to 4 percent, the UDF (centrists, e.g., Giscard d'Estaing) has proposed figures of 3 percent real growth and 4.12 percent of GNP, and the RPR (Gaullists) 4 percent real growth and 4.32 percent of GNP. According to the UDF, the additional money should go predominantly towards maintaining existing army manpower levels, thus avoiding the elimination of the two armored divisions. Members of both parties have criticized the reduction in strength of the First Army.

The other area where the opposition parties seem to diverge concerns the FAR and the Hades missile. Although both the UDF and the RPR desire the development of the Hades missile at a reduced range of 250 kilometers, their motives differ. The RPR opposes the 350 kilometer range because of the potential dependence on NATO for target acquisition and because its use would be decoupled from the deployment of the First Army. The RPR fears that this decoupling could lead to a loss of effectiveness of the tactical warning strike and to a *de facto* loosening of the tie between tactical and strategic nuclear use. The UDF, on the other hand, does not mention NATO dependence or decoupling, but simply states that at 250 kilometer Hades would be cheaper and faster to develop and that the ASMP makes a longer-range version unnecessary.

UDF and RPR differences over the FAR are also due to political motives. The RPR has accused the Government of using the FAR as a means of disguising a French return to NATO integration and to participation in the "forward battle." The UDF does not voice any such political objection to the FAR, but argues on military grounds that the FAR is better suited for overseas interventions than for a European conflict.

FUTURE OPTIONS

In light of current government initiatives and of the conflicting opposition reactions to them, what is the future likely to hold in terms of France's conventional, tactical nuclear, and strategic nuclear contribution to European security? The French Government could take measures within two different frameworks: the present NATO structure or one of European defense cooperation.

Any initiatives within the actual NATO structure would be limited to the conventional and tactical nuclear levels. Three factors will hinder any significant French reinforcement of conventional capabilities. These factors are the limitations on defense spending growth due to the economic crisis, the continued priority accorded to nuclear weapons, and the doctrinal reticence to envisage prolonged conventional warfare. Even the UDF, the most "conventionally oriented" of the French parties, has endorsed the nuclear priority.

There are ways for France to reinforce NATO's conventional defense without enhanced expenditures. France could deploy forces in a front-line position in West Germany. Considerable opposition, however, exists to such action. The RPR in particular is extremely sensitive to anything that smacks of "reintegration" into NATO, as the debate over the FAR demonstrated.

The most likely initiative France might take in the area of conventional cooperation with NATO is to increase logistical support, with contingency planning for full war-time use of French territory, facilities and lines of communication. This contingency planning would be of considerable military importance to NATO.

In the area of tactical nuclear weapons, French development of enhanced radiation weapons could move France further towards nuclear participation in the forward defense of West Germany. But doctrinal sensitivity towards flexible response and towards the warning strike concept probably means that open French endorsement of tactical use in support of European defense will require significant progress in European defense cooperation.

The goal of European defense cooperation receives more attention in France than in any other European country. In no other European country does the idea of a European defense option attract as much debate and interest. This French attitude seems at first paradoxical in view of the limited French contribution to European security. The paradox is explained by the fact that the French role as a partial partner in Western security is due more to a rejection of American dominance of NATO than to a lack of solidarity with the defense of France's neighbors. European defense without American participation holds an intrinsic fascination for the French.

However, a strong French consensus views an independent European defense as a utopian goal for the medium term period. The European countries must thus refrain from any initiative capable of endangering the NATO Alliance. Debate in France consequently centers around ways to strengthen the European pillar of the Alliance.

Considerable support exists in France for the idea that the strengthening of the European pillar of the Alliance must necessarily include cooperation in the nuclear area. Jacques Chirac, head of the RPR, recently declared:

In less than five years, with the system of multiple warheads, British and French nuclear forces will have considerably augmented. They will represent a truly important, even decisive, deterrent force and capability. One can thus envisage that in the foreseeable future, a European-American deterrent will guarantee West European security.

Chirac subsequently retreated from this position and above all retracted a suggestion that Germany would have to participate directly in any future European nuclear decision-making, but he has steadfastly underlined the need for modifications in French doctrine:

Military doctrine formulated during the 1950s and 1960s must be adapted to the international evolution, to the evolution of the East-West military balance, to the evolution of ideas in Europe. We must prepare to confront the risks of the 1990s, not those of the 1960s.

The formation of a European Nuclear Planning Group and the inclusion of defense issues within the purview of the European Council constitute other propositions. It has been suggested that the European Nuclear Planning Group, besides giving rise to an explicit extension of British and French deterrence to their allies, could also provide a framework for joint discussion of nuclear targeting and for an eventual European financial contribution to the modernization of French and British nuclear forces.

The French Government is moving very cautiously in this area. French officials have of course categorically stated that the nuclear force cannot be extended to cover France's allies. Considerable obstacles confront this option. Even with the planned modernization of the nuclear forces, French capabilities for limited strategic options will remain at best greatly circumscribed.

In view of these technical and political difficulties, foreseeable European cooperation in the nuclear area will center on tactical weapons. One RPR defense specialist has argued in favor of a French declaration proclaiming that "the security and liberty of its allies is a vital interest for France, indissociable from its own liberty and its own security." He added that France should deploy tactical weapons, including future neutron warheads, into Germany, where they would back up the declaration that French vital interests include the Federal Republic. The UDF has long formally supported that option. Although Chirac would appear to be favorably inclined, considerable opposition to that initiative exists within his party.

The French Government, in its bilateral discussions with West Germany, has apparently already mooted the question of stationing the Hades missile in West Germany under a "dual-key" arrangement. **Le Monde** editorialist, Michel Tatu, probably inspired by official sources, has written in his newspaper in favor of basing the Pluton and Hades missiles in West Germany, subject to a dual-key arrangement.

The tactical nuclear option in European defense cooperation would appear to have a viable future. Should France implement that option, regardless of whether she formally abandons the last warning strike concept, the doctrinal implications would be quite clear.

The future evolution of French policy depends on several factors. Developments in the United States, the Soviet Union and West Germany will obviously play a large role. Some observers have expressed the view that French assumptions concerning West German "isms" are exaggerated. If the French should reach that conclusion, part of the impetus behind their recent evolution will of course be eliminated.

Yet, one should not underestimate the potential attraction to the French of constructing a strong European pillar of the NATO Alliance. Measures that would normally be identified with the anathema of NATO reintegration could find acceptability under the rubric of European defense cooperation.

The revitalization of the European Community is, in this context, a crucial task. It is difficult to foresee European defense cooperation progressing if the EC fails to resolve the financial matters under dispute. Barring this revitalization, the recent reassertion of French support for allied security will probably stagnate, and France will eventually use the next favorable shift in the East-West politico-military balance to return to a more nationalistic defense posture.